

Meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 23 June 2020, 10.30 am



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee members present

Councillor John Cottier (Vice Chairman,
chaired this meeting)
Councillor Ashley Baxter
Councillor Phil Dilks
Councillor Gloria Johnson

Councillor Mrs Judy Smith
Councillor Linda Wootten
Councillor Ray Wootten

Cabinet Members

Councillor Dr Peter Moseley, Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations
Councillor Adam Stokes, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

Other Members

Councillor Jacky Smith

Officers

Strategic Director, Commercial and Operations (Gary Smith)
Head of Environmental (Anne-Marie Coulthard)
Grounds Maintenance Coordinator, Street Scene (Lynne Lord)
Sustainability and Climate Change Officer (Serena Brown)
Scrutiny Officer (Zena West)
Democratic Officer (Jack Gardner)

Comments from the Committee

The Committee wished to have recorded their appreciation for the work undertaken by Councillor Chris Benn as the Chair of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee wished him a speedy recovery.

45. Register of attendance, membership and apologies for absence

Councillor Benn had stood down as a Councillor. An apology for absence was received from Councillor Nikki Manterfield. Councillors Ray and Linda Wootten attended the meeting as substitutes.

46. Disclosure of Interests

No interests were disclosed.

47. Action Notes from the meeting held on 25 February 2020

Two Members referred to the action notes, noting that they did not recall asking for rewilding to be an item on the agenda and, recognised that it was agreed for one rewilding site per town, reiterating the request that was made for consultation to be undertaken. A Member did not feel the point he had made had adequately been captured that there should be an expectation that mature or more established trees were replaced with something much more than simply one sapling for any such tree felled.

Subject to the above changes, the action notes of the meeting held on 25 February 2020 were noted and agreed.

48. Updates from the previous meeting

The Chair noted that many of the actions from the notes of the previous meeting would not have been actioned due to officers dealing with the Covid-19 lockdown. The Committee heard that many of the initiatives that were discussed at the previous meeting had been suspended during this time.

A Member asked whether the environmental performance indicators mentioned in the previous meeting had been created and when they would be brought to the Committee for scrutiny as well as whether he could receive feedback on his suggested indicators from the responsible officer before the next Committee meeting. The Cabinet Member replied that it was important that these indicators were created and noted that Members might not have been aware of the reduced resource available to the Council during the early stages of Covid-19. Resources had been redeployed elsewhere which had meant that the creation of reports for Committees had not been a priority.

Action:

A performance report to be brought to a future meeting.

Members asked if there was a resolution to the question of ownership in respect of the water fountain on Conduit Road and were informed that it was not owned by the Council. It was also suggested that it might not be possible to restore it as it would not meet water hygiene standards.

49. Review of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy

The Cabinet Member for Operations and Commercial introduced the report and reminded Members that the report would form part of the work going forward for consultation before it could be adopted. It was noted that the current policy was adopted on 1 April 2015. The Policy was fundamental to

protecting public safety and keeping people from harm and provided the framework upon which the Authority delivered its statutory functions relating to hackney carriage and private hire licensing. The current policy had been reviewed to ensure it reflected current guidance and continued to be fit for purpose, whilst also promoting improvements which supported environmental sustainability.

The Committee was reminded that on 23 January 2020 Members of the Licensing Committee and the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee held a joint workshop to consider 3 key areas of the Policy; environmental sustainability; driver knowledge and language proficiency; and the use of e-cigarettes and vaping devices. The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee received feedback from the workshop at their 25 February 2020 meeting. The revised draft policy encompassed this feedback together with other amendments with “tracked changes” was at Appendix 1.

The Cabinet Member provided a brief overview of the amendments previously suggested by the Committee. These included requirements for a language examination and to check whether action could be taken to prevent vehicles from idling. The Committee was informed of the proposed sanctions that drivers could receive for idling, initially with a warning but then subsequent issue of penalty points. Should a driver accrue twelve penalty points within one year, they would be invited to attend a Licensing Committee who would consider and decide whether the driver was a fit and proper person to hold a licence.

It was noted that whilst there was no legal duty placed on the Council to consult on this policy, it was good practice to do so and was in line with the Department for Transport’s ‘Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing: Best Practice Guidance’ (March 2010). It was proposed that a 4-week public consultation would be undertaken and would focus on the hackney carriage and private hire trade alongside the general public and other relevant stakeholders, including the Authority’s Licensing Committee.

Members discussed the difficulties of enforcing restrictions on idling but felt that the proposal was an important part in sanctioning repeat offenders. A Member asked what criteria was used to determine when idling was taking place and was directed to section 2.13 of the draft policy which stated: ‘Drivers are reminded that the Highway Code states that you must not leave a parked vehicle unattended with the engine running or leave a vehicle engine running unnecessarily while the vehicle is stationary on a public road.’

Members unanimously agreed with the feedback and the proposed sanctions from the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy Workshop.

Recommendation:

That following consideration of the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy together with the feedback from the joint

workshop, the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that this draft policy was appropriate and suitable to use as the basis for consultation.

50. Update from the Climate Change Task and Finish Group - 16 June 2020

The Cabinet Member for Commercial and Operations provided the Committee with an update from the recent meeting of the Climate Change Action Task and Finish Group. He noted that the Carbon Trust had been appointed to identify the potential work and areas of focus for the Council so they could address the proposed carbon footprint target set in September 2019 at Full Council. Data had shown that the Council's carbon footprint for the period 2018/19 had been calculated at 7,600tCO₂e. This was calculated from 4 key emission categories; Fuel consumption (Council's vehicle fleet); gas consumption (buildings); electricity consumption (buildings) and leased assets (such as leisure centres). It was noted that just over 30% of the consumption emanated from Council buildings with a further 40% coming from leisure centres.

The Council's pledge in September 2019 had been to reduce the carbon footprint by at least 30% by 2030 with the aim to become net zero carbon as soon as viable before 2050.

The Cabinet Member referred to the bold approach the Council had taken in calculating its emissions and including downstream carbon emissions such as leisure facilities in the total which did not have to be included. The aim of this approach was to help the Council show leadership by setting an example to other organisations and residents.

The initial focus had been on Council buildings and identifying projects that would help contribute to achieving the carbon reduction target. The Committee was reminded that during the collation of data, focus had been channelled down and had concentrated mainly on buildings, water, waste, vehicles and business mileage as these areas had been identified as the main areas of highest output. As a result, three hot spots were identified: Council Buildings, the Council's Fleet of vehicles and leisure centres. It was noted that some changes had already taken place such as installing LED lighting in some Council offices. The decarbonisation work being undertaken by the national electricity grid had also been referred and would also help reduce the Council's carbon footprint.

The following areas had been suggested as opportunities for the Council.

Scope 1

- Gas consumption for heating both space and water in buildings
- Council fleet fuel consumption

Scope 2

- Electricity consumption in Council buildings

Scope 3

- Energy, waste and water consumption from leased buildings such as leisure centres

- Upstream emissions from natural gas, electricity and vehicle fuel
- Business travel in non-Council vehicles
- Third-party disposal and treatment of waste generated in Council controlled operations
- Supply and subsequent treatment of water consumed by the Council's operations

The Committee was reminded of the hard work ahead for the Council in tackling the climate emergency. The significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the way the Council worked, had provided the Council with an opportunity to implement some changes that would reduce its carbon emissions. The Cabinet Member stated that caution was also needed due to the uncertainty of the situation and hoped to work closely with the Committee going forward.

Members commented on how useful the Task and Finish Group was and the significant impact the Carbon Trust report had on them. Discussion took place around releasing the Carbon Trust report in its current format to the public. The Cabinet Member stressed that the Council aimed to publish the report formally shortly.

A Member raised concerns about the Committee receiving a verbal update on the work of the Task and Finish Group. The Chair told the Committee that while this was just a verbal update, further reports and recommendations from the Task and Finish Group would be brought to Committee. One Member commented that deadlines should be set for the Task and Finish Group so recommendations could be produced in a timely manner. In response, the Cabinet Member noted that the timeframes for the group came from the Council's Climate Emergency declaration. Further discussion was around creating a report for the next meeting of the Committee that would outline the work completed by the Task and Finish Group. The Committee heard that the Task and Finish Group was still in the early stage of digesting the Council's current climate footprint. The Cabinet Member reminded Members of the delays that Covid-19 had caused in the work of the Task and Finish Group.

The Committee also discussed areas of working where it would be difficult for the Council to have an impact on emissions such as planning policy. The Committee was eager to show leadership in these areas with a realistic understanding of the legal limitations that the Council had.

Further discussion took place on Members' desire for greater consensus within the Lincolnshire waste partnership. One Member spoke of his belief that the County Council took the credit as the disposal authority while SKDC had the greater share of the expense as the collection authority. The Cabinet Member responded by suggesting that the Council was a proactive and strong voice that sought to build consensus and that he felt the Council did receive a fair share of credit within the partnership. The Committee was reminded of the Council's proactive stance in respect of the food waste scheme. He also shared concerns around the difficulties of educating residents to dispose of their waste in a more environmentally friendly manner.

The Cabinet Member referred to the previously operated recycling credit scheme which had included a method of funding for education initiatives, but since it had been suspended education programmes were now short lived with limited impact.

A Member queried whether total emissions for the District were known as the emissions of the Council would only form a small part of that total. The Committee was told that total carbon emissions for the district were not known and the Council's initial focus was to provide leadership through its experience of identifying and disseminating their findings to industries, organisations, residents and individuals.

The Cabinet Member expected the Task and Finish Group would, as part of its work, help develop potential projects that would be brought before this Committee for consideration and direction for officers to implement and complete. The projects would probably be pragmatic challenges that would tackle the Council's overall carbon emissions which should impact positively on the climate in general. The Cabinet Member stressed that while Covid-19 had provided opportunities, it had also created challenges. With the nation moving into the recovery stage of the pandemic, the financial impact of the virus meant that the Council would need to take a measured response. The Cabinet Member reiterated his thoughts that officer resources should be focused on delivering the projects.

A Member commented on the opportunity in front of both the Committee and the Task and Finish Group. It was coming up to a year since the declaration at Council in September 2019 of the climate emergency the Council faced, and it was hoped that the steps taken would soon be advertised. The Cabinet Member acknowledged that time had moved on and that work must progress. He also noted that the Council should recognise and celebrate the work undertaken by the Task and Finish Group on its' progress in identifying and measuring the Council's impact in order to move on to the next stage. If Covid-19 had not created substantial changes and challenges a lot more could have been achieved.

Action

That a report on the work of the Task and Finish Group be brought to the next Committee meeting.

51. Re-wilding Pilot Scheme

The Cabinet Member referred to the Committee's ambition to increase rewilding and biodiversity within the District. He commented on the suggestions from the previous Committee meeting that were incorporated into the report. The Committee had been provided with information about the consultation undertaken with ward members. Areas under consideration for rewilding together with the results of consultation with ward members were outlined.

The Cabinet Member provided the Committee with a presentation of the Rewilding Pilot Scheme. He noted the key stakeholders were, Town/Parish Councils, SKDC Ward Councillors, local interest groups and residents.

Areas considered for rewilding were parts of the recreation ground in Bourne, the Foxglove play area in Stamford, areas in Queen Elizabeth Park, Wyndham and Dysart parks in Grantham and Tattershall Drive in Market Deeping.

Members were reminded of the types of rewilding being considered and potential benefits.

Rewilding: Allowing nature to take back control, tall grasses and other plant species naturalise are permitted which encourages wildlife, insects, birds and mammals.

Tiered land management: A method of providing multiple levels or tiers with differing levels of rewilding habits within the same area.

Members were also provided with overview of the potential costs and savings for each proposed site.

Reference was made to how the success of the rewilding projects would require the support of both local Members and the local community.

A Member questioned why, when examining the sites, the Jubilee Park site in Deeping St James had not been selected when it had been suggested as a possible site at the previous meeting. The Cabinet Member replied that he was unaware what criteria had been used to determine which site would be chosen but remembered that it was commented on at the time that there were two sites in the Deepings and it was agreed that there would only be one site per town.

Action:

That the criteria used for determining which site was to be chosen would be distributed to Members of the Committee together with an explanation of why Tattershall Drive was picked instead of Jubilee Park.

A Member queried the work undertaken by Environment SK in the Frognall area and referred to a verge containing wildflowers that was maintained by the community but had recently been cut. The Cabinet Member replied that Environment SK was a commercial company and they would be expected to complete work they had been contracted to do. It was suggested that the question would need to be directed to the organisation that raised the work order. It was commented that this was likely to be the parish council.

The Cabinet Member was also questioned about litter picking and cutting down of wildflowers on a roundabout in the Deepings area. The Cabinet Member replied that as far as he was aware South Kesteven had not been informed on the lane closures by Lincolnshire County Council's highways department. Discussion also took place around planting licences that could be applied for verges in order to allow wildflowers to grow or flowers to be planted.

Members thanked officers for their work in bringing forward the proposals to the Committee. One Member commented that time had been lost during the

period prior to Covid-19 lockdown that could have been used to start growing wildflowers. The Cabinet Member noted there had been less time than imagined due to Council resources being used for emergency planning prior to restrictions and lockdown. Members also queried the lack of feedback from local towns and parish councils and were informed that the only feedback received was from Stamford Town Council.

A Member asked why hedge planting had not been included in the update as it had been suggested at a previous meeting. He also queried whether it would be possible for grass cutting to be set at a slightly higher level which would provide a better habitat for wildlife. The Cabinet Member replied that hedge plantings were not part of the rewilding proposals. The Strategic Director for Commercial and Operations advised that the action note from the previous meeting recorded that hedges would be added to the work plan for the Committee, noting that officers would prepare a report when hedges were included on an agenda for a future meeting.

Action:

That a report on hedges would be included on a future agenda.

Discussion took place on the difficulty of managing grass and the conflicting concerns of allowing grass to grow long in order to preserve biodiversity and provide a habitat to wildlife against the desire for residents to have shorter grass for their neatness. A Member spoke of their belief that a compromise between these factors could be found with experimentation but understood the difficulties in managing this. Another Member commented on the Highways policy of allowing residents to adopt verges and roundabouts. She queried whether there was a cost in applying for permission. The Cabinet Member spoke of the Council's decision during lockdown to make parks and gardens as accessible to as many as possible so residents in lockdown could enjoy them.

Further discussion ensued on the proposals on Recreation Road in Bourne and it was noted that sporting events and charity events made it an unsuitable location for wildflower planting. Members were fully in support of rewilding in the area but felt a search for an alternative site should be conducted. A Member raised the possibility of examining North Field as an alternative site.

Action:

That North field (Bourne) be considered and assessed as an alternative site for rewilding and that consultation with ward members would be undertaken.

Cllr Dilks left 12:17

A Member raised concerns about an apparent lack of consultation in respect of Jubilee park and queried whether the proposal had been rejected before any consultation had been completed. Officers noted that the action notes

from a previous meeting had indicated that it had been agreed to look at one site per town and this was what officers had progressed.

Recommendations:

Following a full and frank discussion on the recommendations in the report, together with additional suggestions from Members, the Committee recommended:

- a) That the Tattershall Drive proposal proceeds
- b) That the Recreation Road proposal should not be progressed
- c) That the Foxglove Road proposal proceeds as an updated proposal

52. 2020/21 Committee Work Programme

The Committee considered the work programme and agreed that the following items be included:

- a) Environment performance indicators.
- b) A report on the work undertaken by the Chief Executive's Climate Change Task and Finish Group to go to the next meeting.
- c) Cycling and Single Use Plastics to be included in the workplan and brought to a future meeting.
- d) A representative from the Internal Drainage Board to be invited to a future meeting.
- e) The Committee to receive an update on Rewilding at the December meeting.

53. Any other business which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent

There was no other business.

54. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 12:28.